

## EDITORIAL

# Academy accomplishes goals



**By Staff Reports**

Email the author

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A Tuesday presentation that was part of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office's Citizens Academy was a great example of how this academy helps citizens learn more about how their local prosecutor's office operates.

The Citizens Academy is an effort by the office of Commonwealth's Attorney Phil Ferguson and his fellow constitutional officers — Circuit Court Clerk Randy Carter, Commissioner of the Revenue Susan Draper, Sheriff E.C. Harris and Treasurer Ron Williams — to help local residents become more informed citizens. Participants are learning reams of information about the many duties that fall to each of these offices, with a focus on the prosecutor's office.

Tuesday's presentation by Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Marie Walls drove home just how much participants are learning. Walls, who focuses on sex crimes and child abuse cases, discussed the many laws that pertain to this group of crimes and how they are investigated, prosecuted and sentenced.

Walls laid out the details of Suffolk crimes she has prosecuted. She discussed how the evidence, in these cases, is often what's not there in addition to what is there.

Sexual abuse of children alone is an area that requires much time and attention from Walls and her counterparts throughout the United States. Up to one in three girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused at some point in their childhood, Walls stated. It's estimated that about 88 percent of cases are never reported. In the vast majority of cases, the child knows their abuser — it's almost always a family member or trusted friend.

Walls said Citizens Academy participants can use the information to better look after not only their own children and grandchildren but other children in their communities.

Part of Ferguson's goal for hosting this academy is to help citizens become more informed and able to avoid becoming a victim of crime as well as to spread knowledge to their circles of influence in the community. In that regard, it's safe to say the academy is succeeding.